NATIONAL TREE SAFETY GROUP

# Managing trees for safety

## If you own a tree, then you need to read this leaflet…

### Why read this leaflet?

To help you understand the issues around tree safety and come to a balanced conclusion: one that ensures that trees, essential for the ecosystem and common good, can thrive in the UK, uncompromised by unnecessary safety management.

NTSG

# The risk to human safety is very, very low

**Though tragic for anyone involved, in reality very few people are killed by trees.**

In the UK, only six people a year are killed by falling trees or branches. In a population of 60 million, this means a one in 10 million chance of dying from a falling tree, or a one in 20 million chance of being killed by a tree in a public open space. In other words, there is more chance of being killed by lightning (1:19 million) or of winning the National Lottery (1:14 million) than being killed by a tree on public land. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) recognises that the risk of "being struck and killed by a tree falling" is "extremely low", and is firmly in its "broadly acceptable" category of risks.

There are many reasons why so few people are killed by trees, including:

- Most trees fail in storms, when fewer people are out and about.
- Many tree owners already inspect and manage many of our trees.
- Over recent decades, knowledge and understanding of trees has greatly improved among owners, practitioners and the public.

Disproportionate media attention, especially after storms when trees fall, creates a general public misconception of danger. When asked individually, most people do not have this perception. However, because trees so rarely kill or seriously injure people, when they do, it is headline news. The number of people killed by cars, being 500 times greater, is so common that the deaths barely get a mention. Sadly, these headline stories about deaths from trees have made landowners increasingly more concerned than they should be about the risks from trees and their liabilities if something does go wrong.

# A balanced approach to managing trees

**Caring about the health and condition of your trees is part of tree safety management.** Most people already do this, without realising it. General pruning helps young trees to reach maturity and reduce the likelihood of future problems.

There is an especially strong case for a balanced approach in managing trees for safety. As trees grow, it is natural for them to drop branches. This requires a simple management approach. The HSE supports sensible risk management as part of any overall tree management.

A balanced approach to managing trees takes account of their contribution to biodiversity, the environment, human health, safety and quality of life. An appropriate response to tree risk takes account of the human and financial costs involved in controlling risks. It also gives due regard to the value of trees in the widest sense, and how wholesale tree removal impoverishes our environment.

## Tree management should be reasonable and proportionate

**The NTSG aims to clarify adequate tree management for householders in a sensible and defendable way.**

# What you need to do, or consider as a householder

- You don't need a written tree safety "policy" but you should have a management plan either written down or implicitly understood.
- Walk round your garden once a year in late summer/autumn. If your trees look sound and healthy with no obvious defects, that's all you need to do, job done.
- A tree or branch with no leaves on it in summer is probably dead. If it is large, or at height, it may be dangerous for you to remove it, so call a competent tree surgeon.
- If your tree has what looks like a mushroom growing on it, check the Arboricultural Information Exchange website to see what kind of fungus it is, and what its presence means; or call a competent tree surgeon. www.aie.org.uk/fungi_base/fungi_base.htm
- Cracks in the branches, trunk or ground may need checking as well.
- Most non-experts can identify trees rocking on roots, dead limbs, a dead tree or daylight shining through limb or fork opening.

**The best way to find a competent tree surgeon or consultant is:**

- by word-of-mouth recommendation.
- approval by a trade, practitioner or professional association.
- certification by the college they attended.
- always ask to see public liability insurance certificate.
- don't simply take the cheapest.

**Further information**

This leaflet is based on the key elements of the full guidance document, which is available on the NTSG website:
www.ntsg.org.uk
It is free to download.

- ✔ Get to know your trees
- ✔ Common sense and reasonable knowledge are usually enough to work out the condition of the tree
- ✔ You are probably already taking care of your trees
- ✔ If you are still concerned, go to **www.ntsg.org.uk** for further information

**Managing trees for safety** ISBN 978-0-85538-842-3 Forestry Commission stock code FCMS026